

## A cool approach to a warm subject

**Conradie, Ernst M.** 2008. **The church and climate change.**  
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This booklet was published by Cluster Publications as the first book in their proposed series "Signs of the Times". The reader is, therefore, immediately compelled to read the text from a specific paradigm. The book is organised around seven chapters. The chapters deal with climate change in the news: what is the church doing about climate change; what response is required to curb climate change; the church and consumerism; theological resources for responding to climate change; confessing guilt in the context of climate change; and discerning God's Word for our time. The author states that it is his intention to use and to bring into play biblical and

theological resources for a Christian ecological, theological approach to climate change.

The “church” is one of the focal points of this booklet and it is, therefore, necessary for the author to define this concept in chapter two. He discerns the following “structures” as the church: the local congregation; the worshipping community; the denomination; ecumenical structures; para-church organisations; and the daily lives of believers. The conclusion is reached that only some of these structures are suitable to address the issue of climate change, but ultimately it is the role that Christians play, and can play, at home and in the workplace, that is important.

Chapter three is a brief description of the problem of climate change and includes suggestions from literature and the author on what should, in practice, be done. In conclusion three areas where carbon emissions can (possibly) be curbed by the actions of the church are identified, namely through more sustainable forms of technology, limiting population growth and reducing carbon emissions. A very unconvincing paragraph is dedicated to each of these issues.

Chapter four launches a cryptic and myopic attack on consumerism. The chapter concludes that there are three strategies that the church can use to confront consumerism: a sincere prayer of thanksgiving before each meal; to celebrate the Sabbath; and tithing.

Although the title of chapter five is “Theological resources for responding to climate change”, not a single quote from Scripture forms part of this discussion that concludes that the notion of “Salvation” should be employed to address climate change. This translates to the need for wisdom, a reduction in the polarisation between East and West and redemption of this threat by a victory over the forces of evil. The last of the three is the generally accepted view on salvation, but how the other two can be considered part of salvation is a myth.

Chapter six deals with confessions of guilt in the context of climate change. This chapter very successfully describes and uses the analogy of the whole history, role and processes of confessions in the context of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It is advocated that the church can play a meaningful role in the awareness of, and actions against, the factors that cause climate change, through a process of individual recognition and declaration of guilt for the problem of climate change. This will naturally result in asking for

God's mercy and forgiveness, with a concomitant resolve from each individual to amend his/her ways that are currently resulting in the negative factors that cause climate change.

In summary, a very disappointing booklet. It is way too cryptic to address any of the real issues and unfortunately, with the possible exception of chapter six, adds nothing new to the debate. The fundamental problem with the booklet is, however, the author's omission of the issue of man's stewardship role of God's creation.

The booklet can serve as an introduction to discussions in congregations on the church's role in climate change. But much better discussions and texts are available in the press and on the internet.